the vast volume of the Orinoco, and divided into islands. Twenty-two years ago Colonel Hamilton navigated the Orinoco up to Angostura. At that time he was engaged with the Columbian Government, and had received near Angostura the grant of an immense tract of land, enclosed by mountains on one side, and bounded by the river on the other. He cultivated corn and a variety of other produce which he exported to Trinidad. But the chief production was cattle, reared from importations obtained from Spain, England, and Scotland, and so great was their value that horses sold at Trinidad for nearly 400 dollars, or 80*l.* sterling. That island was supplied with mules chiefly from the Orinoco, from near Angostura.

Mr. John Lee, F.R.G.S., suggested that the Government should send some steamers up the river to make a proper survey, and obtain statistical information as to the productions of the country. An expedition of this nature was not likely to be carried out by private enterprise.

The President replied that this was the course proposed by Admiral Elliot. The object of his communication was to have the subject properly discussed, and if considered desirable, that the Council of the Geographical Society should recommend the plan to Her Majesty's Government. He should like to hear the opinions of commercial gentlemen on the subject, and he thought it fortunate that they had present a gentleman of Colonel O'Connor's information to justify the application of Sir Charles Elliot.

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## 3. *Account of the Search for the North-Australian Exploring Expedition under Mr. A. C. Gregory.* By Lieut. W. Chimmo, R.N., F.R.G.S.

*Read, Jan. 12, 1857.*

From accounts received from Sydney, N.S. Wales, in February 1856, the Secretary of State for the Colonies had serious apprehensions for the safety of the North Australian Expedition; and having applied to the Admiralty for an officer to lead a searching party, I was selected for this mission, and with two hours' notice to prepare, embarked in the 'Royal Charter,' which was on the point of sailing for Melbourne, and made the passage—one of the quickest on record—in 59 days and 6 hours.*

On arrival at Sydney, a delay of two months occurred. I remained waiting instructions from the 19th of April to the 18th of June. After the searching party was collected and organized, I received instructions from his Excellency the Governor General to proceed in the 'Torch,' which had been chartered from her new owners, "*First*, to the Albert River, whence, after making a minute search, and feeling satisfied that they had not yet arrived there, to proceed *secondly*, to the Victoria River and render every assistance that their condition required."

On June 24th, 1856, the 'Torch' left Newcastle, after having been

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* Lieut. Chimmo had just returned from Australia, where he had been employed in the 'Torch' steamer in surveying the coasts.—Ed.

crammed with 150 tons of coal, or 70 more than she had ever carried before; for which reason the Inner Route to Torres Strait was chosen, where, at all events, smooth water was certain.

On July 17th I went as close as prudent to the coast about Albany Island and Cape York, to view a spot on which I hoped soon to see an English flag. It was impossible to pass it without feeling how well adapted the island seemed for a preparatory penal establishment, or until our knowledge of the effect of the climate on European constitutions, was more truly and generally known in the depths of the Gulfs of Carpentaria and Cambridge.

*Albany Island.*—We first passed a bold and regular land of about 400 feet in elevation, nearly three miles long by one broad, lying in a N.W. and S.E. direction, having smooth grassy slopes with valleys of trees, terminating on the S.W. side in rocky cliffs and bold headlands, having on its N.E. side a pretty group of small islets. Here we saw but one canoe, with seven men in it.

Should an establishment ever be decided on, and which has been some time in contemplation, on account of the increased traffic through Torres Strait, for coal depôts for steam communication, as well as a refuge for the shipwrecked mariner, which latter has become so necessary, I have not seen any spot better adapted than this, particularly in a geographical point of view, a commanding position, and exposed to a healthy brisk S.E. trade for half the year. How the N.W. monsoon affects it, I know not. Many would be the benefits arising from an establishment at Cape York or Albany Island, particularly as Port Essington, from its unhealthy site, has been abandoned.

It would benefit the natives, who may be made tractable, as at Port Curtis, Wide Bay, &c., a home or refuge for the shipwrecked sailor could be established. At present he proceeds to Booby Island, where, if his patience be exhausted, he makes a desperate effort to reach Copang. Stores of various sorts for shipping would find many a purchaser, as scarcely a vessel comes through the Barrier without loss of anchors or spars.

Cape York is not so attractive as Albany Island, and is objectionable from being partly surrounded by shoal-water bays. It is particularly barren in appearance. Fresh water is abundant in Evans Bay, two miles from Albany Island.

On arriving at Booby Island on the 18th of July, and searching all the documents in the Post Office there, it was ascertained that Gregory and his party had not passed that way on their return to Sydney. After rating the chronometers and leaving notices for any of his party who might call there, the 'Torch' sailed for the bottom

of the Gulf of Carpentaria, passing through its centre. The bar of the Albert River not allowing the 'Torch' to pass, I proceeded in her boats on the 2nd of August to ascend the river, and after a minute search of six days, came to the conclusion that neither Gregory, nor any of his party, nor the vessel in attendance on them, had, as yet, arrived there.

On arriving at the source of the river, 54 miles from the ship, we all took a searching stroll to the "plains and lands of promise," which did not present to me that boundless luxuriance I was led to expect, the whole country being parched and arid. The long grass had been recently destroyed by fire; the large gum and acacia trees, except those overhanging the river, wore quite an autumnal aspect; the land was furrowed and torn away by the deluge of rains during the N.W. monsoon; huge trees were torn up by the roots, depositing the finest of the soil in the river, and leaving on the surface a few flattened porphyritic stones, with quantities of small perfectly sound ironstone particles. Whether the fires which destroy the grass, and eventually the trees, are accidental or intentional, I cannot tell; but I believe the natives frequently set fire to the grass to seize their prey, such as kangaroos, snakes, &c. In fine, I was not very favourably impressed with either the importance of the stream or the richness of the country, although I saw it under the most favourable circumstances, the winter and S.E. trades. What it must be in the summer, during the north-west monsoon, during hot winds and changeable weather, I would hardly venture to say; the thermometer in the shade was max. 72°, min. 56°, in the sun 134° 5; the amount of ozone was 1 to 3.

I placed notices on every conspicuous portion of the banks of the river, to inform Mr. Gregory that he was not forgotten, and that we were in search of him to give him a fresh supply of provisions and ascertain his wants.

We had but one interview with the natives. On descending the river, in turning one of its bends, up started eighteen, whose numbers soon increased to twenty-eight. They were all armed with spears, boomerangs, waddies, and shields, and were exceedingly noisy and clamorous; so much so that I expected every moment to see a boomerang, which the chief or spokesman held in his hand, whirled at us. I ordered two muskets to be held in readiness, in case he should have temerity enough to throw it. They endeavoured by the most exciting gestures to persuade us to land, but this I would not permit, fearing a collision in their angry moments. I, however, made signs to them to retire a short distance, except the chief, when I would land and speak to him. This they did,

and they all sat down on a small elevated spot and watched most intently our proceedings. I then backed the boat in, and gave the chief, biscuits, pipes, tobacco, and fish-hooks. He also obtained a large coloured pocket handkerchief, which nearly distracted him with joy; wrapping it round his head and waist, and dancing most vigorously on his heels in the mud, sinking at every jump up to his knees. Their anger had now subsided, and they appeared pleased. I cannot tell what this demonstration of violence could be owing to, and I dreaded any act of hostility for the sake of those coming after us. In some of these natives I observed the loss of the eye-tooth, which indicates that they had arrived at the age of puberty, generally 16 to 17. Horizontal scars, along the body, were also seen, 5 to 6 inches in length, gradually decreasing from the chest downwards. Circumcision was also general. There were no women among them, which was a sure sign that their visit was not intended to be friendly. They followed us for 15 miles along the banks, until a creek prevented any further communication. We gave them some parting presents, including another coloured handkerchief, and they brought their weapons to barter freely and eagerly. I was glad when they turned their backs on us, evidently pleased at the meeting. Every expedition that had visited these shores had suffered from the treachery of the aborigines, and I should have exceedingly regretted if any circumstance had occurred which would have left a bad impression or kept up any spirit of revenge on those so soon to follow in our footsteps.

For 12 miles, on first entering the river, nothing can be seen but a dense mangrove bush on either side, growing on soft mud. Beyond this, the monotony is slightly changed by the elevated appearance of some gum and acacia trees. Then, where the river is deflected in a south and south-west direction, bare patches of cliff from 10 to 30 feet in height, separate the mangroves and diversify the scene. Small mangrove islets with sandy spits, at low water, appear. When nearly 40 miles up the river, a change is altogether met with; the mangroves are separated by various gums and acacias, with an occasional palm tree. On the borders of the river, bamboos, rushes, creepers, and long grasses form altogether a dense and diversified foliage. The river is, in general, tortuous, and presents when low, a far different aspect to that at high water. Snags, sand and mud banks, embryo islets, forming round sunken logs, are, at high water, all covered, and an unbroken surface is presented.

I visited the Bountiful Island and Sweers Island of Flinders. At the former we found turtle abounding on the beach and in the

lagoons among the coral reefs, 60 of which were taken upwards of 3 cwt. each. In my notices, I informed Mr. Gregory of this fact, and recommended his sending the vessel there, if in want of fresh provisions. I also found in a hard, sandy patch, on nearly the centre of this island, the bones of five persons, who had either died of starvation or had been buried there. They all lay in the same position with heads to the north; I do not think a grave had been dug, but that the drift sands had accumulated about the bodies, and formed one grave. They had no spears, arms, or any implements near them. A few turtle-bones, shells of the haliotus and helix, were in heaps around. There was not a jaw to be seen with the upper tooth extracted, which is the custom among the North Australians when they arrive at puberty. This circumstance made me conclude they were not aboriginals, but probably a portion of the crew of the Malay proa we had found wrecked on Sweers Island. The North Australians generally bury their dead on trees, or in caves, wrapped in bark or matting, and with their heads to the east, and have always some of their war or fishing implements near them. No indications of these funeral ceremonies were near these skeletons, of which I have preserved one head for examination.

On Sweers Island, the fresh-water well of Flinders was destroyed by the natives; not, I believe, intentionally, but accidentally, from constantly running in and out to draw water. The well dug by Captain Stokes of the 'Beagle,' was also destroyed, but proving to be in the best position, I had it redug and cleared, and we obtained five tons of water from it, and left a notice also to show the Australian expedition where they would find it; planting near and about it pumpkin-seed, onions, and Indian corn. The natives were few and very shy. If they, who were watching us most intently from Bentinck Island, were surprised at seeing a ship under sail like the 'Beagle,' what must have been their wonder when they saw the 'Torch' move through the water by smoke? There was not a native seen on Sweers Island, although there were many there, and their not coming near us may be possibly attributable to fear at so wonderful a structure, moving without the aid of sails or wind.

About a mile east of this well, we found the remains of the 'Investigator's' well, completely blocked up, having only a slight undulation to mark its spot. We halted under the "tree," which still plainly bore the inscriptions of the 'Investigator' and 'Beagle,' the former carved 54 years since and the latter 15. Fortunately I had a bottle in my bag, and I made all heave-to under the tree and join in drinking with a glass of the "Queen's own" to the memory of the adventurous and intrepid Flinders, and to the health

of the next follower of his footsteps, Captain Stokes, R.N., to which was added, as a matter of course, "three cheers."

On our return to the well, we picked up a piece of a lower-deck mess-plate (china), and also a metal tray or inkstand, of European manufacture, the lid of which was gone. It is about 9 inches long, by 5 wide and 3 deep, figured on the outside with leaves of a tree that would puzzle a botanist. Such a thing could scarcely have been left there by the 'Beagle;' and if in the hands of the natives for fifty-four years would have been destroyed if left there by the 'Investigator.' The well, for which we are indebted to the 'Beagle's' visit fifteen years since, we found to be 25 feet deep, the water dripping into it through a rock of concreted lime, sand, shells, and pebbles. Sweers Island is low, thickly wooded with gums, acacias, and a straggling pandanus, and dense grass; the soil is capable of producing Indian corn, yams, cotton, &c. This, with Bountiful Island, would make good headquarters for an exploring party, and I hope Gregory will find it out.

I again passed out of the Gulf of Carpentaria, the greatest depth of which is 46 fathoms, with a soft, adhesive mud, gradually decreasing its depth from the centre to the low, muddy mangrove shores which border the east and south of the Gulf. The only phenomenon worthy of remark was the difference of the density of the sea-water at the depth of the Gulf and at its entrance in lat. 13°, amounting to 7° 7'.

On the 26th of August, we entered the Victoria River, after carefully and anxiously, but unsuccessfully, searching the north coast between the Gulfs, more particularly Treachery Bay, where the expedition first landed, and where Captain Stokes was speared and so nearly lost his life. On my first anchoring in the river, I observed a mark erected on Entrance Island, and near it a bottle containing a notice that the portion of the expedition in charge of Mr. Gregory had left for the Albert River on the 21st of June, and that the schooner 'Tom Tough' had gone to Coepang, in Timor, for repairs.

It was now very evident that my detention for two months at Sydney, might be seriously felt by the expedition. Had I set out on my first arrival, I should have been in sufficient time not only to supply the party with provisions, stores, and despatches, but also to have discharged the schooner and have acted in concert with Gregory, in a steamer, until the completion of his mission.

I proceeded 60 miles up the river in the 'Torch,' and then 40 miles farther in the boats, to Gregory's abandoned camp, where I found another notice of his movements.

After replacing these notices, and leaving one of my intended movements, for Gregory or any of his party, I retraced my steps to the ship, and found that while the crew were watering ship they beheld an interesting relic of the 'Beagle.' Inscribed in large letters on a tree nearest the well, were these words :—

"This river was discovered, by the officers of H.M.S. 'Beagle,' on the 18th Oct., 1839, and was named the 'Victoria,' in honour of Her Majesty, the Queen of England."

Here I had the good fortune to find the rare and interesting bower-bird's nest (Chlamydera nuchalis) among the mangroves, and scarcely above high-water mark at springs.

On arrival at Gregory's camp, 6 miles below Steep Head, we found it looking like an English farmyard, with thatched houses, huts, sheep-pens, horse-sheds, forge, oven, &c. The spot was well selected. We landed on a pier formed of large stones and pigs of ballast. In our road lay iron hoops, rope, tubs, buckets, old clothes, Indian corn, old boots and shoes, pieces of harness ; and we came to the oven, in the interior of which, protected by four pigs of iron ballast, was a bottle, containing a notice to the following effect :—

"Camp, Victoria River.

"On Saturday, 21st June, 1856, the exploring party of the N. A. Expedition, consisting of seven persons, left this camp, on their way to the Albert River, in the Gulf of Carpentaria ; and on Wednesday, July the 2nd, the remainder finally abandoned the camp and proceeded down the river to join the schooner 'Tom Tough,' which had dropped down to Shoal Reach about three months previously. The vessel will sail, as speedily as possible, to Timor, whence, after obtaining supplies, she would proceed to the Albert River, and the detachment of the Expedition on board will form camp and await the arrival of Mr. Gregory. Subsequent information will be left on Entrance Island.

"John Finlay, carpenter of the schooner, died April 22nd, 1856, and is buried near a gouty-stem tree, marked, with the dome, bearing W.N.W. ½ a mile (Tuesday evening the 1st of July).

"The finder of this document will greatly oblige the Expedition by giving it every publicity, and, if possible, by forwarding it to his Excellency, the Governor of New South Wales, or to any other of the Australian colonies.

(Signed) "T. Baines."

After perusing this, we went to the forge, where another paper was buried, containing a similar notice. We returned to Mr. Gregory's hut, and, having drank success to his expedition, read all the interesting notices over and over again.

I passed an hour at the camp, admiring all the arrangements. It

consisted of seven thatched houses, three huts, some sheds for cattle and sheep-pens, two deep and good wells, and an entrenchment all round. No natives had been near the camp since Gregory's party left. A road was cut several miles, in a S.S.E. direction, as straight as an arrow. I sat down at Gregory's table, and penned a notice, after placing which, and while the men were getting their dinners under a shed, I amused myself by sketching the camp from Baines's window, as it was too hot to venture out to do so. The boat's crew, having found a small pot of black paint, inscribed some amusing notices outside the doorways. On the door of Mr. Baines's hut, after I came out, I saw hanging on a board,—"Victoria Hotel. Good Beds, &c. Ginger Beer and Refreshments."

The evaporation in this river is very excessive, amounting to 13° between the wet and dry thermometers. The backs of all our books parched and curled in every shape and form. A boxwood ruler, on my table, warped 3-8ths of an inch in 24. A boxwood thermometer, 3-8ths of an inch, warped 1-10th, threatening to break the glass tube.

Coming out of the Victoria River, the 'Torch' struck on a bank, where at low-water her keel was 7 feet above the low-water line. This bank has accumulated from the strength of the tide, consequent on a rise and fall of 24 feet, since Captain Stokes's survey in 1839, when he found ¼ fathom at low-water springs.

I had intended to make a few remarks during my week's visit to the Victoria River, but Captain Stokes gives so excellent a description of it, that it is unnecessary for me to do so.

Finding that the schooner had only left six weeks since for Coepang, I made all haste after her, but, on arrival there, found that she had been sent to Surabaya for docking and repairs.

At Coepang, I received a request from Mr. Baines to proceed to the Albert River, but as at the same moment Mr. Baines might be starting from Surabaya in another chartered vessel, and we should consequently be sailing side by side until anchoring off the mouth of the river, and then find that two vessels were performing one and the same service, I, the next morning, started for Surabaya, still with a hope of communicating with him. On my arrival there, however, I found that this section of the Expedition had started in a new chartered schooner on the 31st of August; and, from her being a well-found, substantial vessel, she would reach the Albert River about the end of October, long before the Expedition could suffer any privation from hunger.

The PRESIDENT returned the thanks of the Society to Lieut. Chimmo. He rejoiced that they had among them a gentleman who had come back from fol-

lowing the expedition, and had brought home some additional information of importance. It appeared to him that there was a lapse in the paragraph as to no other ship but the 'Torch' having been in the Gulf of Carpentaria; it could not have been the intention of Lieut. Chimmo to say so, after the voyages of Flinders and Stokes.

Lieut. Chimmo replied that all former vessels had only coasted the Gulf, without examining its centre.

The President was afraid that without this explanation, it might be supposed that the region had not been properly explored.

Mr. John Crawfurd, F.R.G.S., had listened with great interest to Lieut. Chimmo's spirited account. In his opinion it was a very correct one, and one of sound judgment. In describing the country at the mouth of the Albert River as very arid, hot, and sterile, he showed it to be wholly unfit for colonisation by Europeans; and therefore, he concluded, wholly unfit for a penal settlement. This opinion, Mr. Crawfurd said, he had stated at a very early period, and he thought Lieut. Chimmo's account most perfectly confirmed it.

Dr. Hodgkin, F.R.G.S., inquired of Lieut. Chimmo whether the natives at the mouth of the Albert River resembled those of Southern Australia. He had the opportunity of seeing two who were brought to England by accident by Captain Strickland, about eighteen months ago. They were tall and slender, and appeared to be friendly disposed. One of them died, and in taking the other back Captain Strickland took considerable pains that he should convey to his countrymen a friendly feeling towards the whites. It appeared that Lieut. Chimmo did not find them well disposed. Dr. Hodgkin said he was also struck with the fact of their being seen in a canoe that carried five or six people; the natives generally were so little competent to perform any work of art that the construction of a canoe of this size indicated an advance which rather surprised him.

Lieut. Chimmo replied, that the natives at the head of the Gulf of Carpentaria were the wildest people he ever met in his life. He was not favourably impressed with the Australian race. On a previous occasion he took nine of them from Percy Island to Sydney — the murderers of Mr. Strange, the Government geographer. He had seen canoes at Percy Island, that carried five or six persons.

The President said, much as the Society had been interested in the success of this expedition, and warmly as they had instigated the Government to pursue it, yet they had had no sort of control as to the conduct and progress of it. The Society was not in any way responsible, further than for recommending certain gentlemen who had gone out as scientific members of the expedition, and who had performed their duties admirably.

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3. *Proposed Communication through North America, from Vancouver Island to Hudson Bay.* By Thomas Banister, Esq.

The routes proposed by the Americans to the southward of the 49th parallel of latitude, as contained in the 'Report of the Secretary of War on the several Pacific Railroad Explorations,' are five in number, and are enumerated in the following order, proceeding from north to south:—*First.* The extreme northern route (Major Stevens's) between the 47th and 49th parallels of latitude, and striking the Pacific at Puget Sound. *Second.* The route of the 41st parallel (Mormon route) by the South Pass, or Great Salt Lake, to San